

COMMENTARY

Steve Doyle: Budget process let taxpayers down



10 HOURS AGO • [BY STEVE DOYLE | ONALASKA](#)

“Slimy.” “Unsound Fiscal Policy.” Budget deals “cut behind closed doors.” School voucher deal paints “the state with one brush.” “In order to get those good things we needed to accept some really questionable things.”

While Democrats may agree with these sentiments, these are not quotes from any of us — they are all quotes from Republican legislators about provisions in their own budget.

A very recent quote from a Republican senator is, “Look, I think that things have gotten way too extreme and out of hand, and when we start taking important policy issues about whether or not we’re going to have bounty hunters in Wisconsin and throwing them in — in the middle of the night — without any transparency, public discussion, or analysis, I think we have a problem.”

I agree that the budget should be open for all the citizens of this state to review and learn what is in it before it is going to be voted on. It’s certainly understandable that legislators are thought of as deceptive when work on the budget is done behind closed doors, in the middle of the night, with

special interest lobbyists giving direction on amendments and changes to the bill.

So, what is in this budget? A tax cut that favors people earning more than \$300,000 while increasing property taxes for all of us. The rich get \$1,440, median income households would get \$109, (barely \$2 per week).

Unaccountable private voucher schools expanded statewide, eventually costing taxpayers \$1.9 billion a year, creating a dual education system paid for by state taxpayers.

After all the talk about fiscal responsibility, this budget still creates a structural deficit of \$505 million dollars.

The budget also allows the state to sell state-owned property — such as power plants, highways or University of Wisconsin buildings — without requiring bids or consent from the university. In the last hours of the Joint Finance Committee, Republicans inserted provisions that would retroactively toss out lawsuits from individuals poisoned by lead paint, legalize bounty hunters in Wisconsin, ease rules that control predatory payday lending operations, punish the Center for Investigative Journalism by ejecting it from the UW campus and allow cable companies to cut off service immediately after a missed payment and then charge a ridiculous reconnection fee.

And whose idea was the tax exemption for junk mail? That’s also in the budget.

Repeatedly, over the course of the four-month budget process, Democrats had proposed three simple, effective and proven actions to make this a middle-class budget:

- Increase public school funding by a minimum of \$275 per pupil to keep pace with inflation and eliminate the proposed expansion of taxpayer funding to private unaccountable voucher schools. This would help public schools recover from the largest cuts to public education in Wisconsin history.
- Accept federal funds to strengthen BadgerCare by insuring 85,000 additional Wisconsin citizens. By doing this, we can cover more people and save \$120 million for Wisconsin taxpayers.
- Build a stronger middle class with a fair tax structure that does not primarily benefit the wealthy or cause an expensive future deficit.

All of these common-sense ideas were rejected out of hand, and the Assembly Speaker said repeatedly that he would not accept a single Democratic amendment.

That's sad.

When we ran for office last year, every one of us championed a platform of bipartisan cooperation and open government. But unfortunately we ended up with a budget that was drafted in secret and does not meet the needs of hardworking Wisconsinites.

Actions speak louder than words. I couldn't vote for this budget because our citizens and taxpayers deserve better.